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SUBJECT: HOMECOMING KING: PRESIDENT SARKOZY'S VISIT TO
HUNGARY

Classified By: P/E COUNSELOR ERIC V. GAUDIOSI; REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (SBU) French President Sarkozy completed a brief but high-profile visit to Hungary September 14, including meetings with President Solyom, Prime Minister Gyurcsany, and opposition leader Orban as well as an address to the Hungarian Parliament. His meetings and public statements were highlighted by calls for a more active Hungarian engagement in regional affairs and EU issues.

"EUROPE NEEDS HUNGARY"

12. (SBU) Following his meeting with President Solyom, Sarkozy stated that "Europe needs Hungary," commenting that France sees "neither large nor small states but equal member states." He noted the sense of connection between Hungary and ethnic Hungarian communities abroad (an issue of particular interest to Solyom, who recently returned from meetings with ethnic Hungarian leaders in the Vojvodina), but emphasized France's "more reserved stance" on regional autonomy.

13. (SBU) In his address to Parliament, Sarkozy noted the Nabucco conference being held the same day in Budapest, emphasizing the importance of a European approach and underscoring France's support for nuclear power. He encouraged Hungary to "take its place in the security and defense policy of Europe," describing NATO and a European defense capability as "two systems complementing each other."

A GOOD START WITH GYURCSANY

14. (C) Coming directly from Prime Minister Gyurcsany's meeting with Sarkozy, Foreign and Security Policy Advisor Karoly Banai told us September 14 that conversation had revolved around a "Franco-Hungarian strategic partnership."

15. (C) Banai predicted that "Sarkozy will change a great deal in Europe," and indicated that he will look to Budapest's support on initiatives including reform of the EU's agricultural subsidies. The GoH will follow up on Sarkozy's invitation to develop joint proposals on certain issues, and Banai expects that future meetings with Gyurcsany are likely both in bilateral and multilateral fora.

16. (C) On Kosovo, Banai reported strong consensus on moving forward on status under a broad NATO-EU consensus. Both parties had agreed that a UNSCR would be ideal but recognized that it is "impossible due to the Russian bear."

A SHORT MEETING WITH ORBAN

17. (SBU) Sarkozy's meeting with FIDESZ President Viktor

Orban is still the subject of speculation. Photos show an obviously uncomfortable Orban and a seemingly dismissive Sarkozy. Although in subsequent remarks Orban praised Sarkozy for "removing neoliberal economic taboos" and accepted his invitation to attend an upcoming political event in France, no one has yet explained why Sarkozy terminated their meeting after only ten minutes.

ANOTHER KIND OF HOMECOMING

18. (C) Comment: The visit was not the sentimental "homecoming" some Hungarians might have hoped for from a foreign leader they still regard in part as a native son, but it was what the Gyurcsany government needed: a visible sign of the PM's reentry into the orbit of European leaders and an opportunity for Budapest to align itself on key issues with a major European power. Particularly with the week ahead marked by anniversaries of Gyurcsany's infamous "lies" speech and the ensuing demonstrations, the government doubtless welcomed a visit that looked good and may lead to more substantive successes in the future. End Comment.
FOLEY